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ABSTRACT

The creative writing process, like any writing process, begins with a prewriting activity. Story starters are one such activity which teachers can use to begin the creative writing process with their students. For example, large cartoon-like characters made on an opaque projector can be used to initiate discussion. The second step requires a drafting of ideas into story form. Thirdly, the youngsters use their peers in revising their stories. The writer is responsible for responding to the criticism and for making the essential corrections. Next, students rewrite their stories and proofread. They are encouraged to use a dictionary or get help from a peer. Noise levels may be louder than usual, but learning is taking place. Once all corrections have been made, the publishing process begins. Given paper with an outline of the cartoon-like character on it, students write the final copy within the drawn character. They illustrate the paper and make covers for their books. Completed books are shared with the class. (SR)

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Big Foot to the Rescue

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Story Starters: A Component of Whole Language

by Bernard M. Marley and Linda G. Marley

Paper presented at the Annual Conference of the
Indiana State Council on Reading

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Big Foot to the Rescue
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Story Starters: A Component of Whole Language

The development of a curriculum based on the underlying philosophy of whole language brings to mind many essential components that are interrelated. Each is critical to curriculum development. With research indicating that there is a direct link between writing and the improvement of reading comprehension, it is only fitting to look at one way to aid our students in improving their writing and reading skills. While it would be appropriate to look at the entire writing process, this article focuses on the creative writing process as a part of the whole language philosophy. Why should one look at creative writing? This area is one in which children can freely express themselves and still incorporate the writing process without fear of rejection.

Often teachers ask themselves, "Where do I begin? What do I use?" In an effort to help the teacher in the creative writing process, the use of story starters is one way to begin. This not only provides the teacher with a place to begin, but also it provides the students with a positive way to begin the writing process.

One type of story starter is nothing more than an enlarged cartoon-like character. It is simply made by using an opaque projector and tracing the desired caricature. The teacher then outlines the caricature with a black magic marker. Color is added by using oil pastels, crayons, or magic markers of assorted colors. The finished product is

covered with lamination; and thus, the finished product can be used from year to year. A variety of professionally made books are available for the teacher to enlarge.

With the colored caricature, the teacher is ready to begin introducing the creative writing process to her class. Suppose the teacher draws a picture of a huge human-like foot for the lesson. The teacher begins the lesson by introducing her drawing to the class. After a few initial remarks, the students begin to verbally express to the teacher their reactions to "BIG FOOT". As the descriptors are given, the teacher develops a schema on the blackboard of the descriptors presented. The students are encouraged to provide as many descriptors as they may want to list. With this activity, the prewriting activity has begun. The teacher needs to keep in mind that the purpose of the activity is to stimulate thought. Obviously, the teacher will have to use good judgment in regard to the length, size and content of the schema.

Once the prewriting activity is completed, the initial writing phase or drafting begins. In this phase the child uses his own writing paper. Also, the teacher encourages each child to use his imagination and write a story about "BIG FOOT". While the children are also encouraged to use the descriptors found on the blackboard, the children are encouraged to use whatever personal ideas come to mind while writing the story. The teacher's role is one of a

facilitator. He is not the story teller in this activity but rather the supporter of ideas.

As the children complete their rough drafts, the second step of the writing process begins. The children seek responses from their peers about their story and seek peer editing. This process is not always quiet, to say the least. The children are encouraged to make suggestions to improve each other's works. This step allows the students to use their knowledge of grammar in an applied situation. Once suggestions have been made, the story is to be revised.

Once the revisions have been completed, the story is reviewed again for grammar, spelling and content errors. The student is encouraged to use his peers, or dictionary for help. Again, the teacher acts as a facilitator rather than as an instructor. While it is hoped that most students will learn to rely on each other, there will be certain students who will need the teacher's input.

Before the student writes the final copy of his story, he is given "BIG FOOT" paper on which he is to write his story. This paper has a large foot drawn on it and the student can write his story within the "Big Foot". The size of the paper is left to the discretion of the teacher. The paper may be the standard 8 1/2 by 11" or it may be 11 by 17". The child is encouraged to illustrate his book. A cover for the book is encouraged. But, this is not the end of the writing process. The most important part is still to come.

The student must share his book with his peers. It may be read orally to the class, or it may be passed around the room silently, or it may be put in the creative writing center for others to read at a later time. The use of a creative writing center allows the collection of children's personal books to grow each time the books are written.

The sharing of books is one of the most important factors in promoting creative writing. Even with the inherent spelling and grammar errors, the students begin to enjoy the writing process. The teacher is encouraged to write and publish his own story. The youngsters always enjoy what the teacher writes because they feel the teacher is one of them when they share.

In summary, the creative writing process is similar to any writing process. It begins with a prewriting activity. In this case, large cartoon-like characters were used to initiate discussion. The second step requires a drafting of ideas into story form. The children are not to be discouraged from using words that they can not spell. Thirdly, the youngsters are to use their peers in revising their story. The writer is responsible to respond to the criticism and to make the essential corrections. Next, the student is to rewrite his story and to proofread it. He is encouraged to use a dictionary or a peer to help him. Yes, the noise level may be louder than usual, but learning is taking place. Once all corrections have taken place, the publishing process

begins. The student is given special paper with an outline of the cartoon-like character on the paper on which to write his final copy. He is to illustrate and make a cover for his book. Once this is completed, the book is shared with the class.

For the skeptics, the process does work. It takes time and patience. Children love to share if we, their teachers, encourage them to share. Writing is a life skill that everyone uses and shares throughout his life.